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ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

AN OPEN LETTER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. Wm. H.S. Wood,
President the Bowery Savings Bank,
New York City.

Dear Sir:—This paper is in receipt of your circular soliciting our support for the repeal of the franchise tax on Savings Banks. We must decline.

In the first place we can not accept your conclusion that “capitalists are prevented by law from benefiting by savings banks.” The law “forbidding any depositor having more than \$3,000 in any one savings bank” is no proof of your claim. A man with \$30,000 can, as you will allow us to remind you, derive full benefit by savings banks as a depositor. All he has to do is to distribute his cash among ten savings banks in order to come within the provision of the law. What one capitalist can, others can also; and they do. Moreover, it is the capitalist, and not the workingman, who is the real beneficiary of savings banks. The amounts there gathered are rendered disposable to the large capitalist interests, who by borrowing, are furnished with the cash wherewith to appropriate improved machinery that Labor, mental and physical, produces but is plundered of under the existing Democratic-Republican-upheld capitalist system of wage slavery. And the improved machinery, thus brought into operation, instead of being what it would be under the Socialist system, a source of blessing to the race, becomes a scourge by displacing Labor and simultaneously intensifying the work of those who remain at work. What that means the increased mortality of our working class tells.

I have so far reasoned under the assumption, for the sake of argument, that, along with capitalists, workingmen are to a large extent depositors in savings banks. To the extent that workingmen ARE depositors, the savings banks are an ironical scourge to their class. In what way? It is indicated above in the passage

that shows the purposes to which the moneys collected in savings banks are put. They bring privately owned improved machinery into the shop and thus displace Labor and intensifies {intensify?} the workers' toil. The workingman depositor may get his interest—a trifle on the trifling deposit which, at best, he is able to make. But for that trifle of an interest, a veritable lure, he has to pay through the nose, as just shown. The privately owned improved machinery either knocks him out of work, or consumes so much more of his life-tissue that he is the positive loser.

Finally, we disagree with you in toto that the savings banks are patronized mainly by the working class. The claim has been made by the capitalist class through their political and official statisticians, and the plutogogues have repeated the claim. The claim is false. It has again and again been proven in these columns with the figures of the number of workingmen taken from the Census, that the overwhelming majority of the depositors (assuming, an assumption that, as you know works in your favor, that each “deposit” means a separate “depositor”) are not, and can not be workingmen, that is wage-earners.

For all these reasons we must decline to join the crusade against the tax on savings banks. The subject is one that deeply, we admit, concerns the capitalist class. In no way does it concern the working class. This paper, being the organ of the Socialist Labor Party, has neither time nor taste itself to act as a cats-paw to rake the hot chestnuts out of the fire for the class that sufficiently plunders the working class; nor will the paper to {be?} aught to lure workingmen to so ignoble a task.

Yours, etc.

ED. DAILY PEOPLE.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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slpns@slp.org